

FIVE INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN JAPANESE FEMALE ANTHROPNOMS TODAY

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Five innovative strategies in Japanese female anthroponyms today

Abstract: Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, this study investigates recently emerging trends in Japanese contemporary personal naming within a sociolinguistic framework. Five anthroponymic strategies are identified in this research beginning with the rejection of the demeaning orthodox suffix *-ko* ('child'). Secondly, the abandonment of moralistic appellation to define and mold personality traits is presented. Additionally, three newly emerging iconoclastic patterns in name bestowal are outlined including the invocation of a Western-style identity, androgynous appellation and the formation of radically unique anthroponyms that break with hitherto established orthographic and phonetic conventions.

Keywords: Japanese, girls' names, sociolinguistic identity, gender ideology, onomastics and social change.

"A name shows a person's substance"

Japanese proverb: 名は体を表す 'na wa tai o arawasu'

Five patterns for selecting female names in contemporary Japanese society are identified in this study; they are labelled *strategies* because they constitute conscious linguistic acts on the part of the name givers. These *anthroponymic strategies* involve opposing social forces: some express the rejection of traditional onomastic practices while others embrace radical and unconventional appellation. To my knowledge, no serious linguistic analysis has been undertaken in English or Japanese on personal names in contemporary Japanese society, although there exist various works concerning classical names and surnames in ancient and medieval culture cf. Plutschow (1995). Of course, there exist a plethora of books in Japanese either serving as a guide to parents on selecting baby names; those in English are mostly limited to giving instructions on how to read Japanese names cf. O'Neill (1973) or again advising on name selection and meanings cf. Uwate (2002). However, my approach is essentially sociolinguistic and follows the Sapir-Whorf tradition which recognizes language as man's primary tool of thought and perception. The act of naming, which is the most primordial of human activities, transcends far beyond its denotational function but also serves as a sustainer and definer of sociocultural order and values. Furthermore, when it comes to naming children the anthroponym chosen has a profound influence on gender identity. Thus, this research also encompasses the field of gender ideology which is

now a major focus of various researchers cf. Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2004) and Inoue (2006) with particular reference to Japanese society today. All the data here is presented in a way that does not require familiarity with the Japanese language so this study may also offer insights for cross-cultural comparative purposes as well as in the search for onomastic universals.

1. Research approach

The research findings here are based on a two year project on both current Japanese girls' and boys' names. I conducted a survey on 50 male and 50 female students aged between 18 and 22 concerning various issues relating to their personal name in 2013. (In fact, the number exceeded 100 but I finally reduced the sample to one hundred of the most useful responses.) However, due to limits of space, the analysis offered here will only deal with female anthroponyms. In fact, I have carried out ethnographic observation concerning naming issues continually for more than four years; I have also interviewed various people of different ages and from different walks of life about their opinion and attitude towards names in the data and their own naming practices. Thus, my research incorporates both a qualitative and quantitative approach.

Another primary source for my data derives from the annual survey carried out by the *Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company* available for public access at the following website: <http://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/enjoy/ranking/>. Ever since 1912 this insurance company has carried out an annual name compilation calculating the popularity ranking of the names bestowed by its now ten million plus policy-holders on their newly-born baby. Although in this study my principal focus will be on the changes that have taken place since the start of the 21st century, i.e. from 2000–2012, a few historical flashbacks drawing upon the *Meiji Yasuda* data are also included in order to provide a comparative and diachronic perspective on naming behavior over the last 100 years.

2. Contemporary Japanese anthroponyms

2.1. Composition, Decoding and Bestowal

According to current practices, Japanese children are usually given only one personal name and typically this is composed of two logographs¹. It should be noted that logographs do not have a fixed word-class status which means they can function as nouns, verbs or adjectives as the context demands. On top of this, a logograph or Chinese character (漢字 kanji) may have multiple pronunciations and diverse semantic interpretations. For example, the girl's name 愛奈 'loving beauty' may be pronounced in 14 different ways either as ENA,

¹ The term **logograph** is preferred here over Sino-Japanese **character** because the word "character" is used throughout this study to signify aspects of a person's personality and the simultaneous use of both words may lead to unnecessary confusion. Furthermore, upon simple inspection of the data, it can be seen that almost every name presented here is composed of two components, e.g. 結 + 衣 YU+ I 'nicely dressed'. The only logographic exception in my data is RIN 凜 'steel-willed' and a handful of names represented in the two non-logographic, syllabic scripts, e.g. in the *hiragana* orthographic system: さくら SAKURA 'cherry blossom' and in the *katakana* orthographic system: キヨ KIIYO 'pure'.

AINA, AKINA, AYANA, CHIKANA, MAUNA, MANA, MENA, MANAN, MICHINA, MEGUNA, NUUNA, RANA or UINA; which one is the desired pronunciation can only be understood after additional phonetic indication is provided; this is written on top of the logographs used for the name in a syllabic script called *hiragana*. Thus, it is very common in Japanese society for most people to experience serious difficulty and produce numerous errors in the pronunciation of a name without any accompanying phonetic transliteration since the choice of pronunciation depends entirely on the name bestower's personal decision when it was created and officially registered. Furthermore, the meaning that a logograph symbolizes can vary considerably and, from my frequent experience when requesting for information about the meaning of an anthroponym, the name holder may often be ignorant about its semantic values without feeling any particular concern or frustration about this obscurity, as is the case for many personal names in European societies today. For example, in the name 愛奈 given above the second logograph can signify 'eternity', 'Nara' (name for a place or period), 'vegetables pickled in saké' or stand for a 'thing of beauty', although the latter meaning is now unfamiliar to most. For the sake of convenience, in this study **only one** type of pronunciation is suggested for each name and **only one** very literal translation will be offered due to limitations of space and to avoid confusing those unfamiliar with Japanese. All names in this study are transliterated into the Roman script and presented with a simple translation but it must be noted that different pronunciations and different interpretations of the names presented here are also possible and ultimately depend on the individual whims of the name giver. Every person in Japan is continuously required to transliterate his/her full written name, including surname, above their logographs on almost every document so the name can be sounded out. Interestingly enough, Japanese bank accounts and computer-based transactions have chosen to bypass the logographic version of the name and operate solely in the syllabic script to avoid the overwhelming complexities of names encoded by logographs.

As for the bestowal of names, 30% in my sample identified their grandfather as the source, although due to a drastic decrease in three-generation households, grandparents participate much less in naming today than two decades ago. 70% in my sample declared their name was chosen by their mother which significantly highlights the empowerment of the mother as name designator. Equally significant as this curtailment of patrilineal authority in name bestowal is the fact that 85% of both males and females in their 20s in my sample expressed the desire to name their own children **by themselves** in their future families.

2.2. Name selection constraints

In Japanese society there exist a multitude of constraints which affect the choice of a baby's name. Among the most significant variables in the selection process are the following:

(i) **Onomancy** or divination, known as *semei handan* in Japanese, predicts a child's future by means of an intricate mathematical system analyzing the number of strokes in logographs; it draws out numbers from the entire name and relates them to, for example, personal traits, the influence of external forces on a person's life as well as inherited qualities. Indeed, it is the primary method of name selection today as is demonstrated by the fact that 75% of the 100 male and female informants in my sample (fifty men and fifty women

in their twenties) declared this to be the principal factor behind the creation of their name two decades ago.

(ii) Another method is the selection of one (or more) of the newborn's logographs from either the father's or grandfather's names, which has long been a traditional method of maintaining the ancestral **continuity of the patrilineal line**.

(iii) **Legal recognition** of the baby's name must be obtained when registering the name in family records at a governmental office and the parents' choice is limited to an officially approved list of 2,997 logographs as of 2010. Logographs not in this list have been rejected by government officials and sometimes there have even been lawsuits by parents challenging official control to name their child. It should be noted that in Japan there is no religious ceremony such as a Christian baptism to legitimize the appellation of a baby. However, if the process of onomancy mentioned above is carried out, this often takes place at a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple, where the mathematical prophecies are ceremoniously delivered by priests attached to the religious institution. An alternative method is to employ online software to make the calculations necessary to issue predictions about a personal name and numerous websites exist offering this service today cf. <http://seimei.linkstudio.biz/>

(iv) The **compositional balance** of the logograph is another factor sometimes taken into consideration when bestowing a name. For example, questions arise such as "Is the logograph too complex for a child to write quickly?" or "Do the logographs chosen for the name work visually in aesthetic terms when combined with each other as well as when placed next to the family name?"

(v) The pronunciation of the name (**euphony**) also comes into play during the appellation process. The iteration of a vowel sound in the personal name and sometimes continuing into the family name constitutes a traditional naming convention, e.g. *Katsuta Tatsuo* or *Hamana Namiko*.

(vi) Of course, the **meaning embodied in the anthroponym** is usually considered as the most significant factor by the majority of Japanese name-givers and this is the principal research focus here.

2.3. Leading girls' names in 2012

Table 1 shows the ranking of the ten most popular names in 2012 according to the *Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company* with my suggested pronunciation and literal translation².

² It should be noted that when more than one name appears in a ranked position, this co-listing indicates that the name is equally tied with the other names in the same ranked position, e.g. YUA and HINATA and MIHARU all vie for fourth place. According to the methods of calculating popularity by the Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company anthroponymic rivalry spills over and leads to gaps in the subsequent positions of ranking. It is important to understand that many different ways of pronouncing names in Japanese exist and there are slightly different semantic interpretations possible; sometimes the same meaning can be expressed with different logographs, e.g. 美 and 奈 can both refer to 'beauty'. Equally important to note is that the same pronunciation can also exist for completely different logographs. In other words, the degree of homonymy in Japanese is high so that both the logographs 美 'beauty' and 心 'heart' can be read as MI; likewise 結 'bond' and 優 'grace' can both be read as YU but their meanings are totally dissimilar.

Moreover, Table 1 also reveals and validates the five onomastic strategies identified by the researcher as they are reflected in the top-ranked names of 2012. It is not an exaggeration to view Table 1 as tangible evidence that untraditional naming patterns have now worked their way into the mainstream and are beginning to attain prominent visibility and favor.

Figure 1 provides a semantic breakdown of the 23 logographic components in the 2012 ranked anthroponymic data summarized in Table 1. It should be noted, however, that there is one name in Figure 1 which has not been encoded into logographs but instead employs the *hiragana* syllabic script; this is the name HINATA ひなた ‘sunny spot’ that jockeyed for 4th position in the 2012 list shown in Table 1³. The meaning of the logographic components appearing in Table 1 have been grouped into simple semantic categories such as *horticulture* (25%), *a loving heart* (21%), *niceness* (17%), *beauty* (17%), *sunshine* (8%) and *other* (12%) in Figure 1. Furthermore, these latter semantic categories may also be re-configured into larger conceptual units because, for example, *sunshine* is a metaphor relating to *a loving heart* according to Japanese thinking just as *flowers* from the field of horticulture represent *things of beauty*. Thus, it is transparent that two types of aspirations are imposed on a Japanese female child today: *physical beauty* (25%+ 17%= 42%) and *warm-heartedness* (21%+8%+ =29%)⁴. The unsurprising conclusion is that physical appearance emerges as the most desirable overall attribute to be embedded in female personal names in contemporary Japanese society.

This stereotypical reduction of females to performing a decorative function like a pretty plant is a reflection of traditional sexism. Such a naming practice has existed since ancient classical Chinese times, e.g. 梅 *méi* ‘plum’ and 蓉 *róng* ‘lotus’ cf. Gao (2011). It is also common in Western female appellation, e.g. **Camelia**, **Florina** and **Liliana** in Romanian and **Flora**, **Daisy**, **Rose**, **Hazel**, **Ivy**, **Heather**, **Holly**, **Iris** and **Violet** in English, although the pattern is much less popular today than in 19th century English-speaking societies. Since the two most popular Japanese girls’ names in 2012 were 結衣 YUI ‘nicely dressed’ and 陽葵 HINA ‘sunny plant’, it is obvious that as the principal naming agents (70% in my survey) mothers are upholding and maintaining sexist ideology by onomastically prioritizing the ornamental appeal of their daughter. This conclusion is in line with the general consensus that Japanese women are reluctant feminists who prefer to conform, at least on the surface, to traditional gender roles.

3. Discarding the diminutive 子 (-ko)

The first and most salient innovative naming strategy is the renunciation of the degrading suffix **-ko** (for which the logograph is 子) signifying ‘little child’, a diminutive attached to a name but never applied to male children in modern times. This suffix reflects

³ Each time a logograph appears in the ranking its percentage out of the 24 items has been calculated. In Japanese the name HINATA (in 4th position) is treated as one word and is encoded here in the soft, flowing, syllabic script of *hiragana* which exudes femininity. However, even though its meaning in English can only be translated two words, e.g. ‘sunny spot’, the name is conceived of as being only one word in Japanese.

⁴ Understandably, some may go as far to argue that *niceness* also belongs in the group of *warm-heartedness* but the truth is that the logograph 結, which I have translated here as ‘nice’, is actually neither transparent nor decodable on an everyday level as an anthroponymic component.

the entrenchment of gender inequality in Japan which can be traced back to the introduction of Chinese Confucianism starting in the 6th century, a belief-system enshrining three patriarchal rules of total obedience to father, husband and, after the husband's death, the oldest son. Still today there remains the maintenance of the belittling suffix 子 (-**ko**) as a marker of female aristocratic lineage because it is currently employed for every single female member of the imperial family, including Princess AIKO (愛子 'loving child') who was born at the start of this century in 2001.

As can be seen from Table 3, every single anthroponym relating to the top ten names between 1921 and 1925 terminates with the disparaging suffix 子 (-**ko** 'little child'). However, upon observation of Table 4 it is evident that a dramatic decrease in the application of the belittling suffix (子-**ko**) took place in the intervening five decades, with 子-**ko** being attached to only 40% of the names in the compilation for 1978 ~1983. It is surely no coincidence that this reduction in suffix usage occurred at the same time as the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement in the West. After perusing Table 1 listing the Top Ten names in 2012, it is striking to observe that not a single name ends with the demeaning suffix 子-**ko**, foreboding its extinction. This concluding prognosis is supported by the fact that in my research sample only 7% of 20 year-old females' anthroponyms incorporated the belittling suffix 子-**ko**.

4. Abandoning moralistic molding

As mentioned above, the idealization of internal traits was the predominant naming pattern between 1912 to 1917 cf. Table 2. This appellation strategy aimed at imposing a chosen ethical virtue on a baby's personality. Venerated moralistic values were encoded into anthroponyms with the hope that the thus named child would be imbued and inculcated with the traits embodied in the name, e.g. 'wise', 'truthful', 'quiet', 'trustworthy', 'shrewd', 'chaste', 'pure' or 'honest'. This convention of naming to nurture a desirable trait used to be a common practice throughout the world. For example, in many cultures personal names indexing courage, gentility, generosity among other virtues are not uncommon for boys or girls, e.g. the Germanic **Baldwin** 'a brave friend', the Slavic **Dazbog** 'a generous god', the Latin **Justinus** 'fair and just', the female Semitic **Adiva** 'gentle and gracious', the female Native American Sioux **Hantaywee** 'faithful', the male Hindi **Sudhir** 'good and wise' and **Bongani** 'be grateful' in the Southern African Zulu language. Coincidentally, this naming tradition is currently in favor in English-speaking societies as the high ranking in popularity of the girls' names **Faith**, **Grace** and especially **Sophie** (< 'wisdom' in Ancient Greek) attests cf. <http://www.babynamewizard.com/> (accessed August 4, 2013) but the degree of etymological awareness connected to these names in English-speaking society at large is debatable. The falling out of favor of this approach in Japan, on the other hand, is indicated in my research results where only 6% of 20-year-old female informants were bestowed with names according to this strategy; this stands in complete contrast to a hundred years ago when 57% of the top-ranked anthroponyms between 1912~1917 were forged with a moralistic component cf. Table 2.

Today, the rejection of moralistic molding through naming is clearly discernible from Table 1. Here no obvious internal virtues are targeted apart from the rather vague notions of a 'loving heart' and 'niceness'. These two traits are reflections of a parental

desire for their daughter to have strong interpersonal skills and good social relations with others. Moreover, this concern for the ability for a girl to express herself *warm-heartedly* should be interpreted within the broader context of the tragic phenomenon of over one million Japanese adolescent and adult “shut-ins” (*hikikomori*) who refuse to engage in any form of social interaction, even with family members. Another significant factor for this emphasis on *lovingness* and *niceness* can also be an indirect response to the rise of the so-called “carnivorous woman” 肉食系女子 *niku-shoku-kei-joshi*, a term denoting the display of icy-cold, aggressive behavior associated with Japanese females under 45. Further connected to this breakdown in human relations is the fact that the number of singletons in Japan has never been as high as it is today, with 45 percent of women between 18 and 34 unmarried, unattached and happily remaining so cf. Herrmann (2011).

The repudiation of moralistic anthroponyms is further recognizable in the popularity of the personal name 未来 MIRAI ‘future’, which ranked second in 2001. This name reflects parental avoidance of imposing any restricting conditions corseting a daughter’s virtues and character, instead freeing *the future* to be created by the individual herself.

5. Invoking Western identity

This strategy violates traditional phonological norms by creating foreign names based on the pronunciation of a Sino-Japanese logograph. What some traditionalists find disturbing about this naming is that the meaning of the logograph is often ignored in favor of the pronunciation, e.g. 杏 AN ‘apricot’ was not originally employed as a separate symbol but in combination with other logographs. The name-givers who opt for this method of appellation are twisting and bending Japanese orthographic rules to fabricate a Western-sounding name that should normatively be represented in the *katakana* angular syllabic script and not with logographs, e.g. アン ‘an’. However, representation in the *katakana* syllabic script would constitute a too radical step for name givers because it also implies non-Japanese ethnicity; for that reason logographic representation is preferred for the name to remain visually rooted in pure Japanese anthroponymic orthodoxy. Significantly, however, as many as 30% of the female 20 year-olds in my research sample had been bestowed logographically based personal names with an international ring such as EMIRI 糸美里 cf. the immensely popular English name *Emily*, MARINA 真理奈 and RISA 凜咲 cf. the English version *Lisa*⁵. The motivation behind this Western-style appellation was in every case explained as the parents’ wish to increase the ease of mobility of their daughters in a globalizing world by providing them with names that were easy for non-Japanese to pronounce and use. There is no denying the fact that in the commercial sphere a Western name in Japanese society is generally regarded as a transmitter of superior prestige and

⁵ *Emily* ranked as the most popular girl’s name of all in the US for over a decade from 1996 to 2007 cf. <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/top5names.html> (accessed August 4, 2013). *Marina* was fairly popular in the US in the 1990s reaching 218th position in 1994 according to data provided by the American Social Security Administration at <http://www.ourbabynamer.com/marina-name-popularity.html#rankChart> (accessed August 4, 2013). *Lisa* also enjoyed considerable popularity in the US during the mid-40s until the 1960s and held the top position as no.1 from 1962 until 1969 cf. <http://www.ourbabynamer.com/Lisa-name-popularity.html> (accessed August 4, 2013).

status attested by the plethora of foreign-sounding names for modern Japanese products cf. Loveday (1996 and 2008). The application of the latter to the onomastic realm leads to the self-evident conclusion that the vocal invocation of a Western identity serves to boost the eminence and sophisticated, ‘modern’ appeal of a name to Japanese ears.

6. Androgynous appellation

Androgyny is defined as having an ambiguous sexual identity with neither a clearly feminine nor masculine nature. 凜RIN translated here as ‘steel-willed’ came in the eighth position in the 2012 popularity ranking of female names while its meaning is primarily associated with manly characteristics such as ‘dignified’, ‘handsome’ and ‘smart’, thus defying standard expectations regarding gender marking. On top of this, there exist many boys’ names which start with this logograph, e.g. 凜大 RIO, 凜空 RIO, 凜久 RIKU, 凜太 RINTA, 凜人 RINTO and 凜也 RINYA.

Furthermore, on the phonetic level Japanese anthroponyms which do not indicate any gender bias are increasingly popping up: RYOU, REO, YU, RUI, KAURU, JUN, HARUKA, NATSUKI, HIKARU, HITOMI, HIROMI and HINATA⁶. It may also be of interest to note that in my research sample 2% of all informants, including boys, followed the strategy of androgynous appellation. This innovative and radical approach seems to be most likely related to the idealization of androgyny in mainstream popular Japanese culture and pop music and, above all, in the domain of Japanese comics and animated cartoons. Because Japanese culture is extremely divided along gender-based lines in many areas of life, including the linguistic cf. Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2004); Inoue (2006), it appears almost paradoxical that androgynous appellation should be embraced at all.

7. Surrealistic branding

The last strategy is the very recent emergence of names, really only since 2010, which are perceived as almost revolutionary because they require a very idiosyncratic reading of the logographs selected for the name. For instance, 天使 would normally be read as *tenshi* (which means “angel” in Japanese) but is intended to be pronounced as ENJERU following the English word **Angel**. The English-style reading of the name is impossible to work out solely on the basis of the logographic elements and would normally be represented in the angular syllabary *katakana* which is strictly employed to symbolize the non-Japanese and represent all foreign borrowings and foreign names. Another more extreme example of this radically unconventional approach is the girl’s name 未仁 MINI derived from the cartoon character **Minnie Mouse**. Such a name bears no logical connection to its logographic

⁶ Although the written representation of the Japanese names listed here may indicate gender identity, they do not reveal any on the phonetic level. Similarly in English a gender-neutral name may be indicated by spelling to show whether it specifically refers to a girl or boy, e.g. **Jordan** for a boy and **Jordyn** for a girl. According to the 2008 USA *Social Security Administration* ranking, **Dakota** came in 226th for boys and 267th for girls respectively; other androgynous names in this American list include **Harley**, **Jaiden**, **Justice**, **Peyton** and **Rowan** cf. http://babynames.allparenting.com/babynames/Ideas/Top_50_Unisex_Baby_Names/ (accessed April 1, 2013) for a list of the top 50 unisex baby names for Americans.

composition which in the case of MINI respectively mean未 “unresolved” and 仁 “charity”. This naming strategy exploits a loophole in the Japanese law that does not control the pronunciation of names as long as they are written in the officially approved logographs⁷.

I call this strategy “*surrealistic branding*” firstly because the socially rebellious appellation transgresses the conventional limits of what is normatively considered as an appropriate or realistic name for a child by emphatically attempting to surpass the ordinary through extraordinary uniqueness, in other words, it constitutes *linguistic surrealism*. The strategy can also be interpreted as a sort of *branding* because an outstandingly unconventional name is seen as giving a child an edge in a competitive world, offering something conspicuously differentiating, value-adding and memorable cf. Danesi (2011). This onomastic branding of a child is often inspired by the parents’ consumerist or mascot-like world-view.

Today these so-called “bottom-of-the class, sparkling”⁸ anthroponyms are frequently derided and vilified as absurd by prescriptivists such as Makino (2012) and on the internet by the Japanese public. Yet connected to this is the very significant result that 70% of the young people in my research sample declared their unwillingness to use divination when naming their own children because it would produce a child with “*only a common name like everyone else*”. This proves the existence of a major group among the younger generation who are searching for a means to express individuality and self-assertion within what was once a society demanding an extreme degree of conformity. Already 2% of the total names in my sample, covering both male and female anthroponyms created 20 years ago, show visible signs of this yearning for individual originality. Actually, in the 2012 *Meiji Yasuda* popularity ranking for girls’ names given in Table 1, 心愛 KOKOA ‘Cocoa’, coming in as high as the 7th position, is often subjected to ridicule as an abnormally eccentric name in terms of its extremely unorthodox pronunciation which cannot be deduced from its logographs at all. Various disadvantages that have been raised in association with such names may include discrimination towards it by future employers or bullying by fellow class-mates or the possibility that children will harbor a grudge against their parents for carrying out what seems to be a kind of verbal abuse committed through bestowing on them a freakish name. On top of these imputed defects, the selection of the name itself may be a source of derision due its perceived frivolity when taken from characters in cartoons and comics, movies or video games or on television or inspired from existing brand products cf. the *iBaby* trend in English where **Apple** for girls and **Mac** for boys are growing in

⁷ This surrealistic branding strategy is a phenomenon that is increasingly gaining attention in various countries, even those which carry out the legal control of baby names, e.g. in Germany **Legolas** and **Nemo** have been recently approved as names for boys by the *Standesamt* (Civil Registry Office); in Sweden **Google** as a middle name and **Lego** have been accepted in spite of the 1982 *Naming Law*. Similarly, even though the New Zealand *Birth, Death and Marriage Registration Act of 1995* forbids children to be given names that “might cause offence to a reasonable person”, **Midnight Chardonnay** and **Bus Shelter** have been approved cf. <http://mentalfloss.com/article/25034/8-countries-fascinating-baby-naming-laws> (accessed April 7, 2013)

⁸ In Japanese they are labelled キラネーム (*kirakira-nēmu* ‘sparkling name’) or DQNネーム (*dokyun-nēmu*), the latter being a derogatory term from internet slang originally signifying ‘wild rebels’ with the lowest IQ in the class cf. <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/DQN> (accessed April 7, 2013).

popularity⁹. The deepest frustration in the Japanese speech community, however, derives from the fact that it is virtually impossible to correctly predict the intended pronunciation of a so-called *sparkling name* directly from its logographs, a barrier which is perceived as linguistically destructive as well as nonsensical to most Japanese eyes.

8. Sociolinguistic conclusions: resistance and subversion

The five innovative strategies identified here clearly resist and subvert traditional naming practices in the way they re-define the operation and execution of gender ideology in onomastic space. Furthermore, it should be recognizable that the five strategies for naming girls crystallize fundamental desires on the part of anthroponymic bestowers such as:

(i) the dissolution of the symbolic handicapping of a female as a “little child” whose virtues should be set down

(ii) the generation of freedom and individuality regarding female identity, although this is still very far from actualization as a social reality¹⁰.

(iii) the construction of a pathway for a daughter to realize herself in a unique and international manner.

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⁹ These names are discussed at http://www.babycenter.com/0_hottest-baby-name-trends-of-2012_10375912.bc#articlesection2 (accessed April 7, 2013).

¹⁰ Many facts substantiate the second class treatment of women in Japanese society. For example, Japan ranks 101st in terms of gender equality among the world's 135 countries when it comes to wage equality, labor participation and opportunity for advancement which is only one notch in front of Middle Eastern countries such as Qatar cf. report released by Swiss-based think tank World Economic Forum in 2012 cf. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf (accessed April 1, 2013). In Japan, women on average earn 44% of what men earn, constituting the widest income gap between sexes in the developed world and the country has a record 10 million part-time workers of whom more than 90% are women cf. Hays (2013). Japan ranked 122nd (out of 139) in the participation of female legislators in December 2012 at 7.9% while the Asian average for female political representatives is 18% according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union site at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed April 1, 2013).

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Table 1: Top Ten Japanese Girls' Names in 2012 showing how five innovative strategies have subverted traditional naming practices

(Source: http://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/profile/etc/ranking/year_women/)

1st	結衣	Strategy ❶ NO belittling suffix 子 (-ko) 'little child'			
	YUI (nice clothes)				
2nd	陽菜	Strategy ❷ Almost no moralistic molding (<i>apart from warm-heartedness</i>)			
	HINA (sunny plant)				
3rd	結菜				
	YUNA (nice flower)				
4th	結愛	ひなた	心春		
	YUA (nice love)	HINATA (sunny spot)	MIHARU (heart of spring)		
5th	-				
6th	-				
7th	心愛	Strategy ❸ Invoking a Western identity Strategy + ❹ Surrealistic branding			
	KOKOA (heart of love/ cocoa)				
8th	凜	Strategy ❹ Androgynous appellation			
	RIN (steel-willed)				
9th	美桜	芽依	優奈	美結	心咲
	MIO (beautiful cherry blossom)	MEI (bud divine)	YUNA (graceful beauty)	MIYU (beautiful & nice)	MISAKI (heart blossom)
10th	-				

* Multiple pronunciations are possible but only one is given here; meanings may also vary slightly but only one literal version is offered here. Note that there is no name available for the fifth, sixth and tenth positions because of the preponderance of other names in previous positions.

Table 2: Top Ten Japanese Girls' Names from 1912 to 1917 with suggested translation and pronunciation*

	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917
1st	千代 CHIYO	正子 MASAKO	静子 SHIZUKO	千代 CHIYO	文子 FUMIKO	千代子 CHIYOKO
	1,000 generations	honest child	quiet child	1,000 generations	literate child	1,000 generation child
2nd	ハル HARU	千代 CHIYO	キヨ KIYO	千代子 CHIYOKO	千代子 CHIYOKO	キヨ KIYO
	spring	1,000 generations	pure	1,000 generation child	1,000 generation child	pure
3rd	ハナ HANA	静子 SHIZUKO	千代子 CHIYOKO	文子 FUMIKO	千代 CHIYO	キミ KIMI
	flower	quiet child	1,000 generation child	literate child	1,000 generations	noble
4th	正子 MASAKO	キヨ KIYO	ハル HARU	静子 SHIZUKO	清子 KIYOKO	文子 FUMIKO
	honest child	pure	spring	quiet-child	pure-child	literate child
5th	文子 FUMIKO	文子 FUMIKO	きよ KIYO	キヨ KIYO	キミ KIYO	八重子 YAEKO
	literate child	literate child	pure	pure	pure	gorgeous child
6th	ヨシ YOSHI	ヨシ YOSHI	ヨシ YOSHI	ハル HARU	八重子 YAEKO	愛子 AIKO
	good	good	good	spring	gorgeous-child	loving child
7th	千代子 CHIYOKO	ハル HARU	キミ KIMI	清子 KIYOKO	フミ FUMI	静子 SHIZUKO
	1,000 generation child	spring	noble	pure-child	literate	quiet child
8th	キヨ KIYO	フミ FUMI	トミ TOMI	きよ KIYO	キヨ KIYO	ハル HARU
	pure	literate	prosperous	pure	pure	spring
9th	静子 SHIZUKO	マサ MASA	フミ FUMI	きみ KIMI	静子 SHIZUKO	美代子 CHIYOKO
	quiet child	honest	literate	noble	quiet child	1,000 generation child
10th	はる HARU	きみ KIMI	光子 MITSUKO	はる HARU	貞子 SADAKO	貞子 SADAKO
	spring	noble	radiant child	spring	chaste child	chaste child

Source: http://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/profile/etc/ranking/year_women/

* Multiple pronunciations are possible but only one is suggested here; meanings may also vary slightly but only one literal version is offered here.

The Top 2012 anthroponymic 23 logographs + one syllabic word

結衣	陽菜	結菜	結愛	ひなた	心春	心愛
YU I	HINA	YUNA	YUA	HINATA	MIHARU	KOKOA
nice clothes	sunny plant	nice flower	nice love	sunny spot	heart of spring	heart of love
凜	美桜	芽依	優奈	美結	心咲	
RIN	MIO	ME I	YUNA	MIYU	MISAKI	
strong-willed	beautiful cherry blossom	bud-divine	graceful beauty	beautiful & nice	heart-blooming	

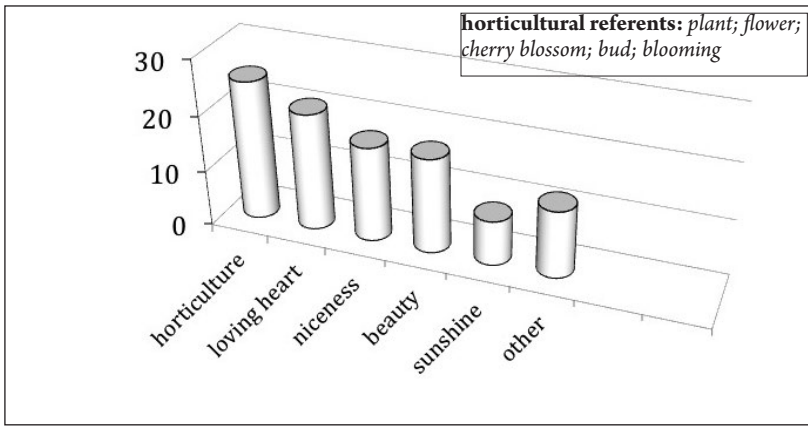


Figure 1: Semantic Breakdown of the Logographic Components of the 2012 Top-ranked Girls' names

Source: http://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/profile/etc/ranking/year_women/

Table 3: Top Ten Japanese Girls' Names from 1921 to 1925

(Source: http://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/profile/etc/ranking/year_women/)

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
1	文子 FUMIKO literate child	文子 FUMIKO literate child	文子 FUMIKO literate child	幸子 SACHIKO lucky child	幸子 SACHIKO lucky child
2	千代子 CHIYOKO 1,000 generation child	幸子 SACHIKO lucky child	千代子 CHIYOKO 1,000 generation child	文子 FUMIKO literate child	文子 FUMIKO literate child
3	清子 KIYOKO pure child	美代子 MIYOKO beautiful generation child	幸子 SACHIKO lucky child	千代子 CHIYOKO 1,000 generation child	美代子 MIYAKO beautiful generation child
4	久子 HISAKO eternal child	清子 KIYOKO pure child	清子 KIYOKO pure child	愛子 AIKO loving child	久子 HISAKO eternal child
5	芳子 YOSHIKO fragrant child	千代子 CHIYOKO 1,000 generation child	久子 HISAKO eternal child	美代子 MIYOKO beautiful generation child	芳子 YOSHIKO eternal child
6	静子 SHIZUKO quiet child	静子 SHIZUKO quiet child	美代子 MIYOKO beautiful generation child	清子 KIYOKO pure child	愛子 AIKO loving child
7	幸子 SACHIKO quiet child	愛子 AIKO loving child	愛子 AIKO loving child	信子 NOBUKO trustworthy child	信子 NOBUKO trustworthy child
8	美代子 MIYOKO beautiful generation child	久子 HISAKO eternal child	光子 MITSUKO radiant child	敏子 TOSHIKO smart child	和子 KAZUKO peaceful child
9	敏子 TOSHIKO smart child	光子 MITSUKO radiant child	静子 SHIZUKO quiet child	久子 HISAKO eternal child	千代子 CHIYOKO 1,000 generation child
10	愛子 AIKO loving child	敏子 TOSHIKO smart child	貞子 SADOKO chaste child	静子 SHIZUKO chaste child	八重子 YAEKO gorgeous child

Table 4: Top Ten Japanese Girls' Names from 1978 to 1983 with suggested translation and pronunciation(Source: http://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/profile/etc/ranking/year_women/)

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
1 st	陽子 YŌKO sunny child	智子 TOMOKO intelligent child	絵美 EMI picture pretty	恵 MEGUMI blessed	裕子 HIROKO prosperous child	愛 AI love
2 nd	久美子 KUMIKO eternally beautiful child	久美子 KUMIKO eternally beautiful child	裕子 HIROKO prosperous child	愛 AI love	愛 AI love	裕子 HIROKO prosperous child
3 rd	智子 TOMOKO intelligent child	陽子 YŌKO sunny child	久美子 KUMIKO eternally beautiful child	裕子 HIROKO prosperous child	香織 KAORI fragrant weaver	麻美 MAMI hemp beautiful
4 th	裕子 HIROKO prosperous child	裕子 HIROKO prosperous child	恵 MEGUMI blessed	香織 KAORI fragrant weaver	恵 MEGUMI blessed	麻衣 MAI hemp cloth
5 th	恵 MEGUMI blessed	理恵 RIE reason-blessed	智子 TOMOKO intelligent child	恵美 EMI beauty-blessed	智子 TOMOKO intelligent child	恵 MEGUMI blessed
6 th	理恵 RIE reason-blessed	真由美 MAYUMI truth reason beauty	愛 AI love	陽子 YŌKO sunny child	麻美 MAMI hemp beautiful	香織 KAORI fragrant weaver
7 th	香織 KAORI fragrant weaver	香織 KAORI fragrant weaver	香織 KAORI fragrant weaver	久美子 KUMIKO eternally beautiful child	美穂 MIHO beautiful sheaf	明日香 ASUKA tomorrow's fragrance
8 th	愛 AI love	恵 MEGUMI blessed	恵美 EMI blessed (with) beauty	智子 TOMOKO intelligent child	理恵 RIE reason-blessed	智子 TOMOKO intelligent child
9 th	真由美 MAYUMI truth reason beauty	愛 AI love	理恵 RIE reason-blessed	絵美 EMI picture pretty	陽子 YŌKO sunny child	美穂 MIHO beautiful sheaf
10 th	恵子 KEIKO blessed child	優子 YŪKO graceful child	陽子 YŌKO sunny child	理恵 RIE reason-blessed	久美子 KUMIKO eternally beautiful child	美香 MIKA beautiful fragrance